



# Sando goes from Crows

Wakefield Sports Clinic Doctor Brian Sando has recently called an official end to his 18-year association with the Adelaide Football Club. He has been there from the very start, no-one has seen more, so we thought we would get his thoughts on his time as a Crow.

**Wakefield Sports Clinic (WSC):** You've been at the club 18 years, what are some of the most memorable moments?

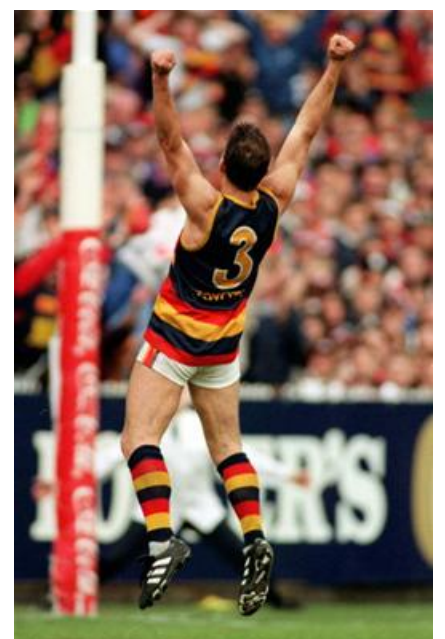
**Brian Sando (BS):** The most memorable would have to be those two premierships in '97 and '98, they were the pinnacle of success for the club. They were made more special because it was almost unexpected. I think it was fair to say we weren't considered premiership material. We weren't travelling *really* well at the time, but Malcolm Blight came along and was able to convert a good team into a special one.

Some of those early days were good, where we had some of those 'interesting torture camps' (laughs). They'd go down the south coast and have fellows abseiling and carrying extraordinary articles up and down over uneven terrain . . . there were some fairly interesting 'non-football-type' challenges put before them. Of course I wasn't at the one camp where they were walking on hot coals, but thankfully the person who (laughs) suffered the greatest trauma from that was the same person who had been very influential in staging it all in the first place.

**WSC:** Looking back at those two premiership years, why were those teams able to win the close ones?

**BS:** Well, that's more a question for the 'football smarts', but I think Malcolm Blight had a great knack for identifying talent and placing players in situations of best fit. I'll never forget his Thursday night speech before the '97 Grand Final where he moved Shane Ellen to full forward, Peter Cavan away from a successful role at centre half back, albeit to stay with Barry Hall, he moved Pittman from the ruck into a tagging role on Stuart Lowe and he also moved Andrew McLeod. I came away from that meeting thinking the only consolation was (St Kilda Coach) Stan Alves will have no idea what's coming! (Laughs) Having freakish game-winners like Darren Jarman helps as well.

Another factor was their great 'stickability'. In the preliminary final against the Bulldogs, we were gone. I remember walking past a group of their supporters and being told to 'go start the bus', and then walking past the



same group after the game a seeing them crying with devastation. Our fitness levels were better than anyone's and a lot of that credit has to go to Neil Craig, who was the fitness coach at the time. We were simply finishing stronger than our opponents.

**WSC:** Speaking of fitness levels, the Crows seem to be at the forefront of fitness and sports medicine. . .

**BS:** No-one will train harder or be fitter and the start of the season than the Crows. Our guys are put through measures and they've got ways of figuring out workloads and each year they seem to be able to get through a little bit more. The disadvantage is that many of the young guys when they arrived at the club were put through the some program and simply couldn't handle it physically. So now the young guys are given a slightly modified program.

Now, even if players *do* get injured, they are still able to maintain an exceptional level of aerobic fitness thanks to input from people such as Charlie Walsh and his cycling programs, as well as pool sessions and the like.

**WSC:** Are there any players who've come back from major injuries and had an impact that stick out?

**BS:** Shaun Rehn is a standout. Three knee reconstructions and still very influential in our success. Trent Hentschel is another. He probably had as bad a knee injury as you could ever experience, and yet just kept working away, had disappointments with muscle strains, but he's back. If he can capture some of the form he had prior to his injury, he's going to be a really important player to the Crows for many years.

**WSC:** Any injuries stand out as being more costly to the team in your time?

**BS:** Tody Modra's knee injury was costly, as he was a star at the time. It's those long term injuries like the knees which take people out for 12 months which can derail careers. Shoulders can also be debilitating, Jason Porplyzia's got sloppy shoulders, but has managed to play through the pain. We inherited a guy with bad shoulder – Wayne Carey – but ironically it was a neck which took him out. Which is sad. His neck injury was that severe that it exposed him to serious risk if he kept going. He never really had a chance to show Adelaide fans what a brilliant player he was. A premature end to an outstanding career would have been devastating for him personally.

Who are the most sublimely talented players you've seen at the Crows over the years?

**BS:** Andrew McLeod is one. He had that little extra burst of speed that turned defense into offense. Darren Jarman is the other standout – great skills. He once said that 'people say I've got natural talent, but me and my brother (Crows legend Andrew) used to spend hours and hours and hours practising . . . it's not natural, I worked hard for it.' Of course there must be some natural talent. It's been said that Australian Rupes is one of the hardest games because of the complex mix of skills required.

**WSC:** Do any players stand out as being harder workers than others?



It's a bit hard to single out players. These days you just don't make it unless you have a huge work ethic. Each player's routine is different, too. Some can joke before a match, while others you take a wide berth around.

**WSC:** So which Crows do you want beside you in the trenches?

**BS:** You'd have to have Mark Ricciuto in there. He's a player who's prepared to give anything. A very charismatic leader who players gravitated toward. From a football perspective you'd need a ruckman. Shaun Rehn has probably been our best over my time. He's an interesting character (laughs) . . . he's got his own thoughts about things. And I think a fellow like Mark Bickley had a really strong work ethic and is a good leader, leads by example and maximised his potential.

**WSC:** 18 years ago would you have thought Australian Rules would become as big as it has?

**BS:** Coming from an SANFL background (25+ years at Norwood) where facilities were in no way plush, my expectations weren't huge. Training out on the Basheer paddock in around gum trees and freezing winter nights and operating out of the bowels of Football Park was certainly a far cry from the state-of-the-art facilities the Club enjoys now. Footballers all had jobs and trained until nine at night. Graham Cornes used to like to meet after practice, so they were pretty long days. But the players became fully professional during that time, and with high salaries come high expectations. Players now accept the long hours and the six-day weeks and the sacrifices of an elite, highly-paid athlete. Even on that day off, they're going around and doing something for a sponsor or visiting kids in hospital, it's really a seven-day-a-week commitment.

**WSC:** You've been the Chief Medical Officer for the Australian Olympic Team for four Olympics, and been around the elite of the elite, how do Australian Rules Footballers stack up?

**BS:** I think they stack up extraordinarily well. Admittedly when you look at some of the Olympic athletes, some of those are achieving their success against incredible odds. No sponsorship or minimal funding. They have jobs, etc and yet they manage to win gold medals. But as far as athletes go, AFL players stack up very well.

**WSC:** What now?

**BS:** I now have a day off during the week. I still take a weekend session here at Wakefield St, but I get to watch football as a fan now and I drift out to Norwood where I started – I spent 25 or 26 years out there before the Crows – and help out occasionally when Andrew (MacDonald – WSC Doctor) is away. More relaxing and trips to the beach house!

### **Brian Sando Bio:**

WSC Since: 1992

Brian is one the most experienced and decorated Sports Doctors in Australia. His long list of achievements includes four-time Chief Medical Officer for the Australian Olympic Team, Adelaide Football Club Chief Medical Officer; Davis Cup Tennis Medical Officer; Australian Track and Field Team Doctor; and Australian Swim Team Doctor. He was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia in 1995 for his services to Sports Medicine and inducted into the Sport Australia Hall of Fame in 2001. His interests include all Sports, especially football, tennis, swimming and anti-doping in Sport.



## **Involvement with Teams and Associations:**

### **Current:**

Chair of AOC Medical Commission  
FINA Anti Doping Control Review Board  
Commonwealth Games Federation Medical Commission  
Norwood Football Club

### **Previous:**

Adelaide Football Club Team Doctor  
Australian Davis Cup Tennis Team Doctor (1983,'85,'93)  
Australian Swim Team Doctor  
Australian Track & Field Team (1984-1987)  
Medical Officer for Australian Olympic Team on seven occasions  
Chief Medical Officer for Australian Olympic Team for four Olympics and three Commonwealth Games  
Commonwealth Games Federation Medical Commission  
Chair of Australian Sports Doping Authority (ASDA)  
Board member World Anti Doping Agency Health and Medical Research Committee.  
Board Member Australian Sports Anti Doping Authority (ASADA)

## **Greatest Sporting Moment:**

1997 Crows Premiership  
Kieren Perkins' 1500m Gold Medal in '96 Olympics from lane eight  
Debbie Flintoff King's 400m Gold Medal at '88 Olympics